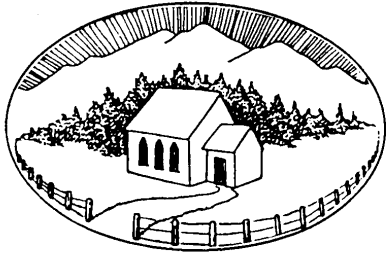


Rural Network News



No. 38

November 2008

We want to simplify our lives, but we
don't want to be inconvenienced.

Rural Network News aims to share ideas for ministry
in neighbourhood and land-based communities.
Te kaitiakitanga, te manaakitanga, te kotahitanga.

Please share this newsletter with others you think may be
interested. Feel free to make photocopies.

Responses to items always welcome.

COUNTRY PEOPLE STILL MATTER

An Experiment in Rural Pastoral Care in Central
Hawke's Bay

The 1990s saw a number of once financially viable rural parishes in the Anglican Diocese of Waiapu having to rationalise ministry. They withdrew fully-stipended clergy and developed local leadership through Ministry Teams using the Local Shared or Total Ministry structure.

Later some proceeded to ordain locally licensed people for sacramental ministry. However, as most were working people – farmers, nurses, teachers, etc. – the traditional ministry of visiting farming families throughout the year became an unrealised ambition.

Waipawa Parish asked me to become a part-time rural pastoral care visitor. I am technically retired from years in fully-stipended ministry and have been able to bring some hard-earned experience to the role.

I have been doing this for a year now. Other places had already done this: e.g. Weber, 40 kms east of Dannevirke, had asked a farmer and local priest, David Speedy, to do this work. I was trained at theological college to visit all parishioners. We followed an old Anglican dictum: 'A house-going parson makes a church-going people'. A great ideal – but in these days of two working parents it requires some planning to ensure that I find someone at home!

At first weekly and now fortnightly I head off early in the morning to visit rural folk in an area stretching from the Ruahines to the sea. The intention is to at first make friendship visits, ensure people know they are part of the parish family, and simply listen. I take with me an information pamphlet of who's who in parish leadership, a parish magazine, and the diocesan newspaper.

Our incarnation God is not confined to a
country church building!

We all like to have folk meeting us on our own patch. It helps us understand that most Christian ministry is going on every day in the paddocks, milking sheds and stock yards throughout the parish. Our incarnation God is not confined to a country church building! (Waipawa is also looking to spiritually care for the 1000+ Pacific Islanders who work seasonally in the big orchards in the region – but that is another story.)

This ministry is an expression of Christian mission and evangelism: people are invited to significant parish events and useful information is feed back to the Team and Vestry. I discover what are the pressing issues and concerns of the local community and there's opportunity to tell people about when services are being held in the variety of country churches that comprise the wider parish.

The parish bears the travel and time costs such a ministry entails (I live in Napier). Phone ringing beforehand helps save time. Also wet days are good times to visit. I avoid visiting on stock sale days or other important rural events. But attending these events is worthwhile in itself as they offer many pastoral opportunities.

However, like many things in ministry, this experiment is a staging post in further development in pastoral care. (I am not asked to visit people in the urban area of Waipawa.) We are looking to

train others to carry on this rural household ministry. In February 2009 we begin a series of training events. Hopefully some will be affirmed by the congregation for it seems that rural people like to be able to trust those who come and visit them on behalf of their congregation.

Being a rural visitor should be a long term ministry.

Being a rural visitor should be a long term ministry. People take time to get to know you. It is only much later that they are prepared to open up to you about their deeper worries and challenges. That is why I am hopeful a team of local visitors can be equipped.

I have produced a short manual for those who haven't done this ministry. It includes a model prayer for use if requested as well as simple theological information to study. Apart from a list of useful books to read, the Team at Waipawa have also suggested prospective visitors apply to the Ecumenical Institute for Distance Theological Studies (EIDTS) to study either Rural Ministry Studies (MM206) or Introduction to Pastoral Theology (MM102). Also, it is important to develop skills that are attuned to the rural setting – knowing how to deal with gates and stock, or when not to proceed further if people are flat out harvesting or drafting lambs for the works.

As a visitor I always find rural families most welcoming. Having an identifying label is helpful, as well as a supply of visiting/business cards.

Bill Bennett, Napier, Hawkes Bay

FACING CHANGE IN EUROPE

Churches European Rural Network Conference held at "Evangelische Landjugendakademie", Altenkirchen/Westerwald, Germany 1-4 September 2008.

Presentations from Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Romania, Scotland, the European Parliament, the Church and Society Commission and young people from Switzerland explored the theme of "Facing Change".

Notification of the conference came through the IRCA emailing Robyn McPhail sends out. I was going to be in the South of France during this time staying with family and helping with a new grandson and when it caught my attention Garth

Cant, fellow member of the Canterbury Rural Unit, my English contact Rev Andrew Bowden, and Robyn encouraged me to go.

Made very welcome, I met some wonderful people, from many walks of life and countries. I learnt much from listening to their stories (especially from the Baltic States) of rebuilding farms, businesses and churches, living lives very different from the repressive society under the communist regime. We do not hear these stories, mainly because we are so far away. We certainly live in a different world in our part of 'Down Under'.

All sessions were translated from German to English or English to German, with individual translators for others. The majority had an understanding of German and it was fascinating to hear different languages spoken. It was a learning experience as we made ourselves understood during social and meal times.

The morning worship in the chapel, led by different members, was a highlight for me. Also of note was learning that many of the problems we face here in rural life and society – youth, unemployment, economics etc. – are the same in the northern hemisphere. Churches have a responsibility to be leaders in change and to set examples by their Christian witness within their communities.

FOOD

Food is precious, very true for those people with insufficient food. The need of food of good quality and quantity is very clear. But why should churches pay special attention to agriculture?

Food is not just a commodity: it is the basis for life, as shown in the Lord's Prayer and Holy Communion, bread and wine, the body of Christ.

Pastoral care of the churches in the community is in part being a voice for the voiceless, encouraging changes in political attitudes and principles. The Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) are currently working to produce a paper on this subject.

One comment: we should be able to buy food within 20kms of where we live – an encouragement to grow one's own.

The realization that the world needs to grow more to keep up with the consumption of food required for growing world population. Food security, the

ethics of food subsidies, costs of producing and distribution to the consumer are all being looked at.

Land is the foundation stone of rural life. Food presented by the farmer is much more than just food, it represents the tapestry of life. From Scotland we were told how the Farmers Markets started and have grown throughout the UK, providing the public with fresh local produce and an opportunity for farmers and consumers to meet.

we should be choosing our food in such a way that our choices bless God's earth

Food is about choice: buy cheap food and that's what we will get; global marketing frequently means a wide variation in control systems, increasing risks of varieties of chemicals. If food is really about choice, then we should be choosing our food in such a way that our choices bless God's earth and those closely involved in stewarding it.

A challenge in all this for us: to stop leaving our Christianity at the supermarket door and shop with clear conscience by buying local fresh produce.

A memorable quotation: "I do not think that God will ask us how he created the earth, but he will ask us what we did with what he created."

NEW ARRANGEMENTS FOR MINISTRY

Another story from Scotland, where they are facing a considerable shortage of Ordained Ministers and Priests in particular in rural areas. This has seen churches being linked together, town churches being linked with a rural church, village churches closing and congregations having to travel to the next village, island churches being linked to mainland churches. As a result there are now an increasing number of lay people being suitably trained and recognized by their Church to continue with Ministry in these areas. A similar story to our situation in New Zealand.

Presenter Martin Robb said in his paper 'Gathered Church':

Remote rural communities are a key element in the social fabric of Scotland. Such communities should not be on the periphery of the church's concerns but become the heart of its vision. After all it was from a remote Palestinian village that the vision of God's Kingdom came in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

The future for the Church in rural Scotland lies in focusing outwards on the needs of the

community and allowing that focus to lead the development of appropriate styles of worship and ministry. Being Church today is increasingly about being transformed from community gathered around a priest to being a 'ministering' community exploring and putting into practice the ministry of the baptized – the response to God's call in each one of us.

Bruce Cameron offered a fishing story:

In Lerwick Harbour in the Shetland Isles, lie two boats. One is a large ferry that sails to Aberdeen, the other a trawler that, with others, will brave the North Sea to gather in the harvest of the sea. The ferry is by far the most comfortable one on which to travel, since the majority of the people on board are passengers who have little to do but be served by the crew.

The trawler, however, is very different. On the trawler there are no passengers, only crew, each with their own responsibility, each important and significant to the task. The challenge for our rural churches is to become like the trawler, in effect 'trawler churches', competent and effective for mission and witness that is collaborative in style and reflects our individual Christian calling.

There are many stories and presentations which will remain with me, as well as the field visits to – Fuhrländer (Friendly Energy World) where they make the wind turbines, another form of energy, wind power, a tremendous and informative visit.

It's blowing outside as I write this and, with the lack of water in our lakes, I wonder: why are we wasting this wind power? We also went to a farm where three farmers combine to share milking facilities and produce biological gas.

It was a great experience and I feel so fortunate that I was able to attend this conference, meet so many wonderful people and to be able to share some of our stories as well.

Janet Taege, Darfield, Central Canterbury

A First Nations Person on Daylight Saving

"Only a white man would believe that you could cut a foot off the top of a blanket and sew it to the bottom of a blanket and have a longer blanket."

OUR UNIQUE RESOURCE FOR RURAL ISSUES

Christian churches in rural Aotearoa New Zealand have at hand a remarkable resource for people on the land. A 'book of books', the Bible offers multiple opportunities for unpacking issues we are troubled by and for shining new light on what often seems to be a very limited future.

The whole of rural life depends on sustainability. Sustainability means economic viability, keeping local communities healthy and caring for land, sea and waterways, inseparable and interwoven. And sustainability is a biblical concern. It is practical Christianity – to pursue righteousness (right relationship) and to give life to individuals, communities and environment.

I am advocating a process that uses this remarkable resource, the Bible. It involves a core group of church people identifying an issue of concern in the local area at a particular time, and deciding to invite people in the wider community to a Community Forum. The purpose is practical – to talk things through together and share strategies for the future.

As an event facilitated by the church, whether in a church or another community building, it is promoted as offering the church's hospitality of a safe place to talk, where all views are respected, sensitivity to personal privacy maintained, and *no hidden agenda*. Farmers are often invited to events hosted by a bank, stock firm, dairy company or fertilizer company, or by an investment group promoting retirement options. The church can offer a place simply to be on common and equal ground.

New Zealand farmers of wary of easy answers whoever is offering them

The Bible enters the scene simply as a tool for conversation. It is definitely not presented as the book with the answers to hand over with the promise that all will be well. New Zealand farmers of wary of easy answers whoever is offering them: they are inherently suspicious of experts who come from outside to tell them what they should be doing. For many, if they have any experience of the Bible, it has been this kind of 'One Truth', conform and be saved approach. Alternatively

people have an overwhelming sense of the Bible's irrelevance, expecting from it what one person perceptively describes as "an excess of metaphorical afterthought". That is, definitely not something that "deeply engage[s] in the problems that effectively determine our lives."¹ Texts that are so familiar in their pinned down, spiritual meaning (e.g. the Garden of Eden) have been judged of no earthly use to people of faith on the land. Much of the Bible is about rural life and yet we do not realise it. This is in part at least because it has been talked about in a way that relates more to an individualist approach to faith and salvation, and to urban existence with human beings detached from the land.²

there is so much of real life in this book

The Bible contains a wide range of texts – narratives, songs, teaching and future visions – that tell not one story but many, not one grand narrative but a rich mass of pathways and possibilities. In fact there is so much of real life in this book that it even contains mixed messages. As one person put it (speaking of Genesis but it applies in many other places also), there is an 'intentional hybridity'³ as different strands of tradition have been brought together into the written text. Differences have not been smoothed over but allowed to stay and reflect both the reality of life and the ultimate unknowability – the holiness – of God.

We remain appropriately ambivalent at times about the Bible's conflicted God, now angry and giving judgement, now full of mercy and loyal love. As Job learns, if there is one thing we can be sure about, it is that God will not conform to our expectations of tidy systems of reward and punishment, success and failure.

A Bible which gives room for bewilderment and uncertainty is more true to the realities of our rural lives than the Bible of certainty and instruction that

¹ Phillip Goodchild, "Debt, Epistemology and Ecotheology," *Ecotheology* 9.2 (2004) p.173.

² In the world of those who first told the story, the Garden of Eden's key themes appear to be food and sex – food supply and fertility – which happen to be issues constantly on the minds of agricultural and pastoral farmers.

³ Mark G. Brett, "Earthing the Human in Genesis 1-3", in *Earth Story in Genesis*, ed Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield: 2000, p.85.

has been on offer almost without exception in our churches.

If the 'many perspectives' approach to the Bible seems to make it unreadable, which in many places, truth be told, the Bible is, then New Zealand farmers know well the puzzle of trying to read the unreadable. For this is what we live with constantly. Almost every day decisions need to be made in the midst of a cacophony of voices – the strong voices of big players in economics, the niggling voices of government compliance, the immediate needs voices of family and farm, and the quieter yet deeply compelling voices of ethics and ecology. 'Who am I to listen to?' we ask.

The Bible ... as a partner for conversation

The Bible can therefore feature in a rural community forum as a partner for conversation. It helps us try to read the unreadable and see something for the future. Text talks with context and the way I suggest doing this is by offering the text as a 'window' through which to take a look at our current context. The first task therefore is to identify the particular concerns that the Forum is focussing on. One example is drought, where an extended period of dry weather has people noticeably stressed, withdrawing into themselves and finding it hard to go off farm even for a few hours. Another topic could be 'The Future of Family Farming', an issue that continues to concern us as more and more land goes into corporate hands and succession between generations is more difficult to achieve.

With the details of the issue identified, a story is then told: a biblical narrative retold as a story in familiar language, drawing out the issues that relate to our particular concerns. It is a moment to relax and enjoy a narrative, and can be offered as such, like a pause in the process after naming the difficult issues and before getting down to hard work together. Stress is always a feature of farming issues, whether climate problems or corporate pressures or concern for continuing the family tradition of life on the land.

A story can be like a prayer for calm and a clear head. But as a story that relates to practical concerns it will remain part of the conversation as people turn their minds to these issues. Its images and ideas will linger in their minds.

The next step is in small groups, carefully selected if relations between people (including among extended family members) suggests this would be wise. Questions are provided that focus on different facets of the issue and may include questions framed from perspectives provided by the biblical narrative. For example, the book of Joel gives a story of land disaster in which the theme is honour and shame. How do we deal with the shame experienced when disease or drought or outside influences put viability and our relationship with the land to the extreme test? (Return to God, lament, reconnect, says Joel.)

One or two questions relate to strategies and next steps. When it comes to coping with rural trials the experts are those who are gathered. As people talk together about their struggles, as they lament the situation they are in, the instinct is to be fellow-travellers, sharing the pain *and* sharing techniques for moving on. Leaving with just one thing in mind that one plans to do is in itself empowering and can prove to be a turning point.

It's hard to be green when you're in the red.

'It's hard to be green when you're in the red.' This succinct statement expresses perfectly the ambivalence of living with integrity on the land. People of faith – those who are part of our churches now but also many others who, as experience has shown me, are looking for ways to live and work with the land that is spiritually grounded – are trying to read the unreadable. They want to make choices that are life-giving, in economic terms and in terms of the viability of the local community and the health of the land.

This statement is a plea for understanding that sustainability is a whole of life matter for rural people. They are not saying, do not expect us to be green because it is impossible, but rather help us by recognising that the issues we face are so entangled that only an integrated approach can go anywhere. Economic survival, ethics, the common good, political negotiation, technical nous and ecological mutuality are all essential for sustaining the place in which we give and receive life.

The local church can be a venue for encouraging this integrity and for building skills and confidence to go the Christian way in our work.

Robyn McPhail, Kaeo/Kerikeri, Northland

HOUSE CHURCH MISSION

In the previous edition of RNN Bruce Fraser, Mission Advisor for the Presbyterian Church in Otago and Southland wrote of his 2007 visit to the Cariboo Church in Canada. We continue with the second part of his report and news of a planned visit to New Zealand by David and Linda Webber in June 2009.

Coastal mountains to the west, Rockies to the east, Cariboo Church on the Cariboo-Chilcotin plateau covers one fifth of British Columbia.

Go to www.cariboopresbyterianchurch.bc.ca for parish vision and history, and a map.

The team is: David and Linda Webber along with Charles McNeil and his wife Shannon Finley, all at Lac La Hache, about an hour south of Williams Lake, the principal town of the Cariboo, and John Wyminga and Shannon Bell-Wyminga based in Nazko, about three hours north from Williams Lake. The team also includes the elders of the parish. Together they provide:

“A HOUSE CHURCH MISSION REACHING OUT WITH THE LOVE OF CHRIST TO PEOPLE IN RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS BEYOND THE REACH OF THE TRADITIONAL CHURCH”

LEADERSHIP

One of the points in the vision for the Cariboo is the encouraging of members to discover and use their gifts. As yet that has to be fully realised.

All agreed that it is an ongoing problem of finding people who will take up the challenge of house church leading. The idea is to have elders in each house church who can have the oversight of that group, but the groups are so diverse that some, as yet, do not have anyone who is able to fill that role. Others have several elders, especially at Williams Lake and McLeese Lake. There are some elders who are doing a tremendous work in various aspects of the parish life. Elders are appointed because of their gifting not geographic location.

A number of the elders were mentioned as having very significant ministry roles in the parish. Ginny Alexander, as well as being an elder is also a lay missionary with training within the PCC. Along with all the work she does she has also planted another house church out of the Lac La Hache church. Other elders are involved in ministry to seniors and others are involved in chaplaincy and community organisations.

David supplies most of the teaching for the seven house churches that he is involved with. One meets weekly with him never present but providing oversight through meeting with the leaders. He meets weekly with others and provides the teaching/preaching, except when he is away. Most of the music and Christian education is in place. David's sole function is pastoral oversight and teaching. All of the rest of the mission and ministry happens without him even involved in the organization. It is done by others or it does not happen at all.

In the churches Charles oversees, he does the teaching about 75% of the time at Lac La Hache and the rest of it happens largely under his oversight with two of the Ruling Elders doing most of the actual leadership. Charles has worked hard at doing Elder development to foster all of this.

Jon and Shannon have oversight of about eight house churches.

For David, one of the greatest challenges is finding leaders who are trained and have a heart for this work:

We [Presbyterian Church of Canada] have a model of ministry that is antiquated, and trying to find people who are open and can relate to people of all different denominational backgrounds and no denominational background, who are willing to go and sit with two people, if necessary, and pastor them after you've driven for two hours; [people who] can let go of numbers and structure to accept rural realities in this kind of area, that's really hard, and when we're training people in the city, it's really hard to find people who are leaders [for rural settings]. We've started to realise we've got to find that leadership within the ministry. I don't think the seminaries or the theological schools hold a heck of a lot of hope.

In the Cariboo, the distances involved are a major challenge for the leadership team. Jon and Shannon in Nazko are very isolated and lack the closer contact with colleagues desirable in ministry. Charles and David both live in Lac La Hache and can meet face-to-face. The leadership team connect each week by way of conference call.

CONGREGATION CONNECTEDNESS

This challenge for the leaders is reflected in the life of the congregation. As I asked in each place what they saw as the major challenge facing them, a sense of fellowship within the wider parish was a recurrent theme. Comments suggest each part sees

itself as a separate entity and for many there is no real feeling of being part of the whole.

Another concern was the desire of many who come to the Cariboo to hide away and not want to be 'found,' but in the church it is hard to hide. There is also the sense that unless you have been in the place for 40 years or more you don't belong, which resonates with many rural communities here.

One social issue in the Cariboo are the pressures being experienced by the ranching families. Ranches are farms that raise livestock, usually beef. Farms vary in size and it takes 5-7 acres to support one animal in this area. The Canadian dollar was high, stock prices depressed and, along with drought, many are no longer able to make a living from their farms. I got the impression that ranchers were not generally wealthy, but they are fiercely independent. I was very mindful of the pressures the New Zealand farming community went through during the economic restructuring of the 80s and 90s. It seemed to me that, for different reasons, the ranchers were facing similar times and are seeing the end of the small family farm much as we have in parts of New Zealand.

The logging industry in the Cariboo is also in crisis.

The logging industry in the Cariboo is also in crisis. There is an infestation of mountain pine beetle that is wiping out vast areas of pine trees. Global warming is thought to be a contributing factor to this – not so cold winters (cf. -40°C in the past) are not checking the beetle as once happened. Mills are closing and people being laid off. This has serious effects downstream in the communities that depend on timber for their survival.

COMMUNITY FACING

Despite the small size of the congregation and the vastness of the geographical area, the parish does much in reaching out to their community.

Ministry with First Nations people occurs in four locations. The local Carrier people live on reserves and Shannon Bell-Wyominga told me that much of the heritage and customs have been lost. Part of their work is to help preserve and enhance what still remains. Shannon works in crafts based on the traditional Carrier people styles and encourages others in this.

to encourage the local people in their own identity and culture as well as share the Gospel from within that cultural context

Jon and Shannon also arrange visits from other First Nations groups in both Canada and the USA to encourage the local people in their own identity and culture as well as share the Gospel from within that cultural context. They welcome other groups of various ethnic origins to come and be part of the community of Nazko.

I was present for a Bible Class Jon and Shannon run for the local school pupils. Three a week for various age groups, they meet in the local community centre adjoining the school. There is also a women's craft programme.

McLeese Lake House church staffs two other Sunday services from its members, along with a monthly community dinner. They were planning and practising for a community Christmas event while I was there and they also have a community men's breakfast each month which is well attended.

At Lac La Hache the congregation is involved in a children's school lunches programme. Charles said they are asked, "Why do you do this?" even though none of the congregation had children at the school.

"You get the uncomprehending look, but the reality is that the gospel is being played out by these kids having something to eat."

The answer was because hungry children need to be fed and the church is part of this community. And God loves children and wants his love to impact their lives and the lives of their families. The church was not touching these communities through the traditional church programmes so they had to find other ways. Charles said, "You get the uncomprehending look, but the reality is that the gospel is being played out by these kids having something to eat."

Last year the parish was involved in several rodeo churches, a week-long men's retreat, a three week young men's Christian boot camp, daily holiday Bible schools, a weekly community outreach dinner, worship services in the communities at

significant times such as funerals, Remembrance Day and Thanksgiving.

And the list goes on: the work of a congregation of about 300 spread over some 80,000 square kilometres!

Bruce Fraser, Otago-Southland Mission Advisor

The Presbyterian Synod of Otago and Southland are hosting David and Linda Webber to New Zealand in June next year to speak at a rural conference in the Otago Southland region.

The Webbers would be available for other regional events in New Zealand. If you are interested in hosting them at a gathering in your region, please contact Bruce at synod.mission@xtra.co.nz

TRANS-TASMAN 2008

CONFERENCE BOOK

Trans Tasman Rural Conference 2009 book will be available shortly in either PDF format (free) or hard copy (price to be determined).

Please contact Peter Carrell to place your order: peterc@nelsonanglican.org.nz

Sign in the church baby nursery

"We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." (1 Corinthians 15:51)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

In the International Rural Church Association prayer/news emailing, Christine O'Reilly from Ontario, Canada wrote the following:

I have been in regular contact with the Rev Solemon Batti from Indonesia since the Brandon conference. As a rural pastor that does a lot of travelling, I was so moved at the determination to proclaim Christ through such difficult conditions - we all recall the photos of pastors on motorcycles in terribly rutted, muddy, narrow roads!

In consultation with Solemon, my two congregations did a project this spring where we raised just over \$4,000 Canadian to purchase a motorcycle for a rural pastor, and supply some school fees for that pastor's children. We are in the process of the technicalities of wiring the money from our Credit Union to the Indonesian church's

bank account. It has been a great project with much interest from each church. To God be the glory that we are able to partner with our rural brothers and sisters... I remain humbly thankful for these kinds of contacts and the richness it brings to us... God is amazing, and I've been so privileged to meet such amazing people along the way.

If you would like to receive email Prayer/News from IRCA, contact chirmac@xtra.co.nz

If you'd like to know more about an agriculture and marketing partnership between New Zealand and this same region in Indonesia email chirmac@xtra.co.nz for contact details.

IRCA 2010

The International Rural Church Association has scheduled its next conference for 2010.

At this point the proposal is:

Date: 20-26 September 2010

Place: Landjugendakademie, Altkirchen/Westerwald near Cologne

It is expected that a Conference Scattered experience to different parts of Europe will be available in the preceding week.

Keep an eye on www.irca.is for information.

WEBSITES OF NOTE

www.irca.is

www.canadianruralchurch.net

www.earth-ministry.com

www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk

www.ruralministry.com

RNN Archive:

www.presbyterian.org.nz/4766.0.html



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Contributions of news, views, insights on anything to do with the rural church and its gospel mission gratefully received.

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